



**TO MARY
A SON
IS BORN**

BY DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.



May

The Coming

Of The Christmas Child

Find

The Happiest Christmas

In Your Heart



SUMMARY

Because the Gospel story of the birth of Christ is stark, unadorned salient fact, to each child of Mary is reserved the delightful privilege of filling in the intimate details that must have attended Christ's coming to men. Here Father Lord has exercised his privilege. With loving outline, delicate shading and highlighting, he draws his picture of the first Christmas, Mary's Christmas. Reprinted here is a rhythm on the Third Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, adapted from Father Lord's book, *The Song of the Rosary**

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To Mary A Son Is Born

THE comic pennants of the donkey's
ears

Flapped on before.

Each foot he lifted with a new reluctance,
Protesting, not the burden that he bore,
Mother and unborn Child,
But all the miles that lay behind since
Nazareth.

Others might find delight in hills
Rolling their curves, lifting their green-
furred backs

To rub against the sky;

His instinct knew them

For the rocks that slipped away

Under his testing hooves,

The stubborn heights that sharpened as he
climbed,

The downward slope that tricked him into
speed

Unless he called his stubbornness to fight
Against the drag.

Hills hard to climb

And harder to descend . . .

These he had kicked reluctantly aside.

And now ahead the scenes and sounds that
meant

A village with a stable and fresh straw,

Silent companionship, water and hay,

And time to stand and meditate the silly
fact

That humans took the roads, not sportively,
But when some emperor,
Some pompous demigod who held more
power than sense,
Grew curious and greedy
Of his subjects and their power to pay.
Let humans trudge; why must they with
them drag
Their beasts to bear them company
And tote their loads?
Donkeys were never counted in the tax.

“Bethlehem,” said the quiet man who held
the lead rope.
And the Woman raised her head
And somewhere deep found words:
“Thou, Bethlehem, town of the land of
Judah,
Art not the least among Judea’s princes;
Out of thee shall rise the Captain
Who shall rule my people, Israel.”

The Captain and the Christ — and Beth-
lehem.
Her doubled heart within beat to a rhyth-
mic pulse,
And she was glad that journeys found
their end
And Bethlehem could learn the purpose of
its founding.

The dust-brown donkey kicked a cloud of
dust
Up from the dust-brown road, quickening
speed

At magnet of a stall and grain and drink.
Fresh dust was joined with dust
Upon the long blue cloak
She wrapped around them both,
A cloak already shadowed with the dust
of Galilee
And Samaria and the leagues that lay the
weary way.
"A little more," he said, his rough voice
low,
As one who speaks so gently that the sleep
Holding the dreamer lightly
Will not be disturbed
Or, waking, she will know
No fear.

Lo! Bethlehem.

The city out of which had come
The star of David,
Into which will come King David's Son
To rise the brighter, fairer flashing Star
Burning across the skies of all the years,
The pilot Star of all who sail the seas
And walk the lands.

Then even as the Maiden Mother dreams
awake,

Up in the purple drapery of the sky
An angel pinned the pendant cluster of
the stars,

Faint, yellow, twinkling giddily,
While stripes of golden silk joined velvet
drapes

About the divan of the night.

In nearing Bethlehem small friendly stars,

First one and then a hundred,
Pricked the dusk
As women lit their lamps,
And soft domestic fires
Grew bright beneath the sacrament of
evening meals.
“You are so patient,” Joseph said,
Humble before the wonder of her humbleness,
Her strange obedience that brought her
thus
From home, from all the things
She had got ready for the coming Child,
From empty cradle waiting for the Babe,
From warm, protecting walls and curtained
cots,
Because an emperor greedily grew proud
and wrote,
“Go to your native city; there
Be registered and taxed.”

To Joseph much was wonderful and strange.
That he of all mankind should wed this
Maid;
That angel warning kept him from her
side —
Had more than purity, transparent, tender,
strong,
Not held him back;
That from a husband hesitant he should
become
The one protector of the Word made flesh,
And her whose flesh He took
To be the flesh of God.

After the revelation of her joy and his,
His days had first been dazed.

Yet worked he as he never worked before
To shape wood for the thrifty villagers
So that their coins might fill his withered
purse,

With which to buy conveniences for her
And safety for the coming of her Child.
His tiny house had suddenly become
Gateway of God.

His shop became a shrine,
For sometimes Mary sat
Reading as Joseph worked —

Her voice a throbbing, mellow, reedy flute—
What prophets spoke, naming the promised
Child

They eagerly awaited.

Then as within her, blossom grew to fruit,
Fruit of her womb,

Lovelier still she waxed

In living proof

That God indeed was with her, that her
own love grew

To match His growing.

Ah, to be not unworthy of that trust,

Joseph had prayed,

Watching beside her as she gently slept

Holding her secret.

Ah, to play angel, strong and wise and pure,

Guarding her safe from evil and from harm.

Angel and safe provider, double role he
played,

Loving the precious two,

Mother and Child.

Another hundred paces, and 'twas Bethle-
hem —

Not safe and friendly Nazareth —

A town unknown to her and hostile,
Strange as cities are and like all strange
things

Seeming savage,

Crouching in the dusk,

The lights like glitters in the eyes of
skulking beast,

Or glints of sly suspicion in the human eyes
That film against the stranger.

“We shall find room,” he said, more to
himself,

Clutching his courage,

Than because she listened who was deep
content

To hear the beating of an extra heart,

And love, not needing words, her Child.

About the caravansaries,

Snarling and dusty,

Swirled the great caravans

Topping the smaller but not less insistent
pilgrim bands.

The camels sneered,

And donkeys brayed aloud,

And village dogs snapped at the muddy
heels

Of strangers heavy with the smell of spice,

Of perfume and of foreign marts and slums

And unfamiliar villages.

A knot of gesturing men,

Husbands the most part

Under the prodding of the wifely eyes
Squinting through veils,
Badgered the keeper of the inn.
He raised the barricade of shrugs and
shaking head
To their insistence.
Off by themselves, like cloistered linen tents,
The hooded women waited till their lords
Had found them shelter,
Marshaling complaints
Should husbands fail.
The callous keeper of the inn,
Letting them raise their bids upped by his
silence,
Took the shrewdest census
From the cut of cloak, the sound of rattling
purse
Held 'neath his nose,
From value of a camel or the saddle studs
That tricked a donkey,
Or better from an insolence that topped
his own.
Others had found it hard,
This order of the emperor,
Bidding them travel ugly, wintry roads
For taxes and the census;
Not he, the keeper of the inn.
A lucky wind had blown this time from
Rome.
It blew into his inn
The pilgrims and their purses, till his inn
Swirled with the eddies of their comings in,
Their goings forth, lightened of coins
That spoke the nations.

Timid the carpenter, slow in city ways,
Waited his turn, where turns belonged to
him

With ramlike shoulder and the driven point
Of sharpest elbow.

Round him clinked the gold as husbands
bid —

Fearing the wifely wrath —

Fantastically for shelter through the night,
A bit of bread and meat, a cup of wine,
A dozen withered dates,
Some dusty figs.

The pattern of a dozen tongues all speak-
ing arrogance

Or sly subservience or clamorous bribes
Was all translated to one ugly language —
Gold.

“No room,” he heard the tavern keeper snarl
At one far better dressed than he.

“No room,” to him who rode a golden mule
Beside his mounted wife.

And as he stood, all diffidence,

The last accepted guests went cramming in,
Turning the universal key of shining gold.

Then Joseph turned to find his little wife
Without reproach or worry,
Deep in the contemplation of the joy
That was within her.

Surely, he thought, shelter must lie
Along that lighted street.

The tapers burned in windows, and the
wicks

Danced in their bowls of grease.
Returning rich men walked that avenue,
Great flambeaus held by servants
Swiftly leading them to shelter of their
homes.

Along that way, well habited,
Must lie some hospitality.

For love of her and of the unborn Him
The bashful Joseph rapped at alien doors.
Refused, he rapped again.

The donkey stood, bored indignation in a
dusty coat,

Cheated of stall and sleep and meal.

But Mary moved in dreamland, waited
happily,

Came when the donkey walked led by the
rope,

And silent, utter patient, sat, to hold

The treasure in her breast,

The treasure men denied

A resting place.

How long before the skin will bloody break
On knuckles rapping at unfriendly doors?

How long before the eyes know at a glance
The answer will be, "No"?

How long can one hear laughter in the
house

That turns him from its gate,

And watch through grudging slit

The merriment and joy within,

Blocked by a cold, "No room"?

How long

And not complain, grow bitter,
Hate the selfishness?
Humiliated, crushed, he heard
The last door slamming shut,
The bolt thrust home,
The feet that turned away
To find the warmth and shelter they denied
To God and God's own Mother.
Why, thought the Carpenter,
A hundred doors he'd made, doors such as
these,
Fashioned within his shop
And never guessed
They'd slam against the knock of charity,
Go darkly, inhospitably black
To weariness and want.
Why he had made a hundred dinner ta-
bles . . .
Watched the husbands bear them home . . .
Nor dreamed he'd be denied, he and his
wife,
A place at one of them.
A hundred, hundred chairs he'd made,
Sturdy and strong, restful after the day
In field or mart or shop,
Only to find there was no chair for him,
Nor yet a cot on which his precious wife
Could bear to life and light the Son of God
And earth's salvation.

And all the while
He knew her hour was near, oh perilously
near.

"How soon?" he asked,

Dreading her soft reply.

But Mary, lifting high her smiling face, in
which

Was only joy,

Love, and the certain hope that very soon
She'd see her blessed Son,

Whispered, all ecstasy,

"Very soon . . . dear Son, come very soon!"

Around them fell the draperies of night.

A thousand stars came out expectantly,

As if they knew the great event to be,

And danced in sheer delight.

There in the middle of the village square,
Buttressed with laughter that was not for
them,

Lighted by windows blind to God's own
need,

Houses so filled there was not room enough
For just one more,

The God who came to earth,

He stood, poor Joseph, helpless misery,

A failure in the work God trusted him to do.

Then through the night a reassuring sound,
The ripple of a flute,

A wisp of song floating along the breeze,

And merry, dancing footfalls.

Out of the lane, across the village square,
Four sturdy shepherds danced to the piping
flute,

Their work as yet undone,

The night ahead,

And laughter in their hearts.

They saw this graven figure of despair,

The futile man,
The silent Woman on the weary beast;
And, kindly as they often are
Who have the least to give,
They paused in friendliness.
Why not?
They interchanged a nod.
Bad as the stable was, 'twas better sure
Than night beneath the sky
Or sleeping on the dusty slopes
Or in the village square.
Too far indeed it lay for those
Whose journey should have closed
Long hours before,
Yet still not really far . . .
Up one last sloping hill
A league beyond the town . . .
And it was theirs if they would take
And occupy the shelter for the night.
The piper pointed with his flute,
Showing the way.

Their offer was a stable where they drove
 their sheep
Out of the summer storms.
No palace, frankly they confessed, surely
 no decent place
For one —
They could not see her face —
That seemed so young and close to lambing
 time.
But it was theirs.
Gladly the shepherds yielded it
Out of abundant hearts, most willingly.

The courtly Joseph bowed his thanks.
The silent Mary blessed them inwardly:
"The shepherds saved my little Lamb of
God."

Away the shepherds dance along the nar-
row street

Into the brightest page that history ever
wrote,

Into the hearts and love and gratitude
Of all the Christian world,

Into the windows of a thousand homes,
The cards that speak man's bravest, dearest
joy.

Into a million cribs that grace the shrine,
The nursery, the convent chapel,
And the vestibule of vast cathedrals
They dance their way,
With how much cause for dancing!

The donkey turned again,
The weary carrot of his hope dangling
before his nose,
And climbed another hill.

Faintly upon the far horizon broke
A comet,
Rushing as to keep a tryst
Set it before the gaseous earth had cooled
And stars had found their places
In the dance celestial.

Mary and Joseph
Found the stable door, black, yawning,
Just a gash cut in the hill,

A cave roughhewn, its walls held back
By rotted timbers
And its roof dropping its loam and spiders
to the floor
Deep in its ancient muck.
The Lady of the Christmastide took stand,
Peering into the dark, repellent depths.
The Queen had found her palace,
And the King
Was to be born within the place assigned
To Him who made the whirling stars,
Assigned by those who twisted souls to
callous selfishness.

Had she but backward glanced,
She might have seen
The summer palace where the tyrant came
To find his pleasures
And a pagan queen who ruled the Holy
Land
Had rested on her bed of down
To bear her brat
Foredoomed to murder and historic shame.
Stars that looked down on her looked down
In not too distant Rome
Upon the terraced roof where Caesar's wife
Sat with her ladies
While the fans of slaves
Stirred artificial breezes in the near-by
nursery.
Had she but loosed a rock,
Mary had seen it roll
Down the long, sloping hill

To knock once more in vain
Against the coppered door that guarded
 well
The banker and his wife and selfish brood
Of greedy children.
The foxes had their holes, there in the
 mountainside;
Above, the breeze-swept nests of birds held
 safe
Against the threats of night
Their feathered families.
Mary must turn a cave into a home
And make a palace of this stable,
Where the oxen hesitate to pass the night,
Preferring God's sweet air
To stuffy fetidness and filth.

The God whose lavishness
Sprinkled the sky with stars
Like daisies in the springtime meadow . . .
The great Creator's Son,
Who taught the mating birds the gracious
 arts
Of making nests . . .
Placed in our human hearts
The love of nurseries . . .
Created wood and copper, iron and ivory
Docile to serve as furnishings for homes,
For beds and stools, cupboards and easy
 chairs . . .
That Son of God will know a stable
And a cave allotted Him by men —

All He deserves who made the world so vast
And generous.

So men determined;
Mary, otherwise,
Ah, surely otherwise.

If it be dark within, bright glows her love;
If it be chill, her arms will shelter Him;
If it be foul, this stable, pure her soul
And spotless her reception.

"Let there be light," once God had cried.
Now flint on steel, a little flame leaps up,
Cupped in the hands of Joseph;
And then a fire appears, lighting to deep
distaste

The fetid stable,
While it warmly touched the eager faces
Of the beloved two.

The gentle flame touches to red and gold
The silver cobwebs,
Washes with magic gilt
The earthen walls mildewed and musty,
And pales before the gleaming of their eyes
Waiting the coming King.

For Mary saw
Back of the mystery,
A mystery of godlike wisdom.
Here had the great Creator found what
heaven lacked,
Sweet poverty.
Here could the majesty of God be humble,
Humble as plea of love,

The service of an unrequited lover.
Here could the God who made the mighty
earth
Show it was worthless, label it as vain
Compared with heaven.
Here could the mighty God teach values
To toplofty men.

Sweetly the Virgin Mary entered in,
And magical
The cave became a palace for the King,
The stable turned into His nursery
As from its darkness and its matted filth
Forth to the waiting world would swiftly
flow —

Defying time, the ravages of years,
The blight of doubt, the stifling of despair,
False faiths that would deny,
False tyrants bent to crush it —
Joy to the world, and peace to worthy men,
And gaiety to children, and the grace of
God

Lifting one day at least of all the year
To Christmas glory and the glad Noel.

The watchtowers of God's city, crammed
with eager angels,
Wait for the tocsin.
Out of the east races the Meteor,
The Star of Jacob rushing to its King.
Choirs of angels sound experimentally
The chord they soon will strike,
Fitting new music to the bravest words

That ever roused the hopes of men
And set their faith aflame.
The scrolls of prophecy in angel hands
unroll
What has been said since God first promised
men,
Exiles of Eden,
That from Woman's seed
Would come deliverance.
Rolling again the scroll, the angels see
All was fulfilled, the time complete,
And, fresh miracle indeed,
Rome was at peace, its legions resting and
bored,
Its swords and spears polished and stacked,
Guiltless at weary last of human blood.

Three watchers on an Oriental roof
Far to the learned East
Sighted the rushing Comet and exclaimed,
"Either a King is born or soon will be.
This is the hour that history awaits
And we have known would come."

Satan, his realm secure, his mission served
By clever, willing messengers,
The nations' provinces
Of Hell Imperial
Calling him emperor who ruled his captured
lands
Through minor demons, masquerading gods,
And monarchs' vassals in the pledge of
power delivered

In return for fealty,
Satan himself was calm,
As calm as fire and smoke,
The worm of conscience and the gnawing
 hate
That never gave him peace
Would tolerate.
Satan was very sure and very safe;
For Rome was his,
Held by a man who called himself a god
And slavelike served the Devil.
Sin owned the earth, its marts and mer-
 chantmen,
Armies and fleets of war,
Learned academies,
Temples and shrines,
And groves obsessed by fauns,
Forests where spirits howled, the spirits
 of the damned,
And homes that centered in their silly gods,
Lucifer's lesser envoys.
"Surely," thought Satan, "God has forgot
 His children,
Delivered them to me,
Despairful of the men He made,
Men who had turned against Him,
Rebels embroiled in endless wars of sin."
"Surely," he gloated now, "the world is
 mine;
The Christ too long delayed,
And evil deep entrenched
In forts impregnable."
He smiled his blasted smile, and lightnings
 flashed

And devils squealed in acquiescence and
delight.

Within the prison house of limbo
Dwelt the saints, with time so wearisome
That every drawling instant seemed an age,
Each hour an infinite, distressing boredom,
And God forgetful.

Yet there around the council table
Sat the prophets
Daniel and Jeremias, David,
Isaias — prophet of the Infancy —
The holy scholars counting years and days,
Matching their prophecies
Against the bearings of the times.

“He must be here,” they reasoned,

And saw His types:

Adam and Abraham;

Moses, who led the chosen people first
Whom He, the Christ, would lead forever;
David the shepherd singing of the Lamb
That stood before the shearers,
Unafraid.

Gravely they nodded:

“Soon will He appear,

And we shall know the hour of our release
And limbo’s liberation.”

So heaven waited,
And the powers of hell stood hoodwinked
In their pride and sinfulness;
Limbo strained through the bars
That held the prison house,

Seeing what they could see.
All time and tide swirled to a single point,
Finding a single center,
Focusing on a cave
Where sat a little Maid who deep within
her
Held her blessed God and ours,
Hope of our race, Creator of the stars,
Conqueror of the devils, Liberator of the
souls
Prisoned in limbo.
She knew with leaping joy
It was the hour of her deliverance.
Soon would she see her Son;
Soon would her Son be born.

Over the stable paused the Meteor.
The gates of God swung in a gush of glory.
The angels poised, waiting releasing word,
The news that He, the Word divine,
Out of God's love for men
And Mary's love for God,
Indeed was born.

Then at the council table of the Three,
Divine command was heard:
"Let Him, the Son of man, in time be born,
The King of Kings, the Prince of Peace,
The Lord of all the world,
The Child of Christmastide."

All suddenly a Maid,
New miracle,

Looked in the cradle of her waiting arms . . .
And there He lay,
Her Baby and her God,
Her Child who was the King
For whom the world had waited,
As had the Mother,
Patiently impatient.
So God was born,
Waking no mother's pain,
Leaving no trace of Eve's sad curse.
And lo! His Mother held in ecstasy
His Infant form against her breast
Flowing with virgin milk
And love beyond containing.

A moment's silence while the earth stood
still,
Heaven was chained in awe,
Hell shook as with an earthquake, cause
unknown,
And limbo's prison gates rocked in the
promise
That release was very near.
A moment's silence while a little Maid
Worshiped the sweetest Child
And sweetly loved her God,
Giving to Him who gave us everything
Love of her soul and from her bosom
Food and warmest shelter.

Did love obscure for her the wondrous
things
That God had wrought?
Was she so caught in worshiping her Babe
twenty-six

That she forgot all else
Of mystery and miracle?
Did tidal waves of motherhood sweep her
 along,
Her and her little Child alone,
As if upon the earth there were no one
 but they?
Who knows the secrets of a mother's medi-
 tations?
Who knows the thought that welled in
 Virgin breast:
Such poetry that could not hope for words;
Such ecstasy that passed prophetic pen;
Such exaltation that the wretched cave
Was more of heaven than was heaven itself
As in the compass of her arms
She held,
Clinging to her,
The God of paradise?
All this, if God be generous,
Mary will tell us in eternity.
This we shall learn when too we later learn
The fullness of the miracles
That made the wonder of our Christmas,
Hid now in blinding light
And in the cavern shadows,
Both too vast for human sight or under-
 standing.
Then we shall know
How God from high could stoop so low;
How heaven found the hollow of a hill
And paradise a cave;
How all of history could center there
About a tiny Babe, a Maid, a man,

And earth's Creator could be helpless
wrapped
Within a Virgin's veil.

God is a Child, and all of heaven's court
Is traded for a Mother and an humble car-
penter.

Then shall we know in revelation's light
How through a Virgin's womb
God tunneled down to earth;
How to the perfect spirit all divine
Could human flesh be joined
Till beasts might look upon the face of Him
Who made them all
And tiny earth contain infinity.

Now we but know
That rapture in the face which bends
Above the Babe;
That fire of love that compensates for all
The lights of paradise;
That circle of her arms more dear, more
strong
Than cycles of the planets;
That dancing of her eyes more dear
Than angels' dancing near the great white
throne;
That tender lullaby more sweetly heard
Than all the music of the choring spheres
And all the chorus of the cherubim
Singing, "Hosanna!" and "Holy! Holy!
Holy!"

Then as the Mother lifted high her Babe,
And Joseph knelt,
And through the door the dust-brown donkey
Thrust his pennant ears,
All nature joined to worship at the crib.
And we can join ourselves to all of them,
Kneeling in silence where in silence kneel
The breathless universe and all the waiting
years.

Silence, and then
The universe is made with rushing move-
ment.
In a blaze the Star
Suddenly fills the sky
With whitest lambent light,
An exclamation point marking God's great-
est deed,
Stabbing to pause and stop
His greatest wonder.
Swiftly along the pathway of its beams,
Straight to expectant hills where shepherds
wait,
Scions of shepherd king,
Hurtle the angel choirs
As Christian hymns are born.
"Glory to God," they sing . . .
To God on high, to God on low,
To God in heaven, God within the cave,
God on His throne and at His Mother's
breast,
God once of battles, now the tender God,
God so remote become so very near,
So very intimate and warmly close.

“Glory to God, and here upon the earth
Peace to those men whose goodness is their
law.”

Glory to God,
And to the earth
Peace
For the godly men.

In tempo with angelic speed
Down from their hilltop rush the shepherds,
Knowing the friendly cave that had been
theirs
And now was turned the center of the
world,
The most important spot in history.
Mary it is who lifts the wondrous Babe,
The God made man,
The man Child who is God,
To angels crowding round adoringly,
To shepherds laying at His feet their lambs
To please the Lamb of God
And her who shepherds Him.

Out of the East, riding at periled speed,
Magi and princes, joining ancient lore
To angels' joy and sweet simplicity
Of shepherds.
To each and all of them
Mary exalts her Child
And God's.
They find the Infant with His Mother,
Waiting for all mankind,
The simple and the wise,
Angelic hosts and running peasantry,

Scholar and scientist,
Princes and carpenters.

Thus sweetly, simply
Was our Christmas born . . .
Born in deep darkness that we might have
light;
Born in the cold that we might know God's
warmth;
Born in the lonely cave that we might feel
The near delight and presence of our
friends
Sharing our Christmases.

Thus through a simple Maid, to history
And all the ages, all the reach of time
Until the world's last fall into oblivion,
Came God and joy and faith and hope and
love

And sweet Noel,
God's news, "good news" beyond all dreams,
Fulfillment of the prophecies that dazed
The very seers who spoke them.
Thus through a Maiden came
Our God,
Our Christmas Child,
Our all.

Too soon the angel hosts must leave
This paradise on earth
For sentry duty and their choir stalls
Before the throne of God.
Shepherds returned them most reluctantly
To tend their sheep, as duty bade them do.
Wise Magi, princes, laid before
The Infant's feet
Their kingly gifts, kissing His Baby hands,
Calling Him King beyond the kings of
earth . . .

Then hurried back to tell the Gentile world
That all the nations soon would know sal-
vation.

Over the scene again came silver silence,
And a Baby's lips nuzzled His Mother's
breast,

And strong maternal arms circled Him
close,

And two hearts, sacred and immaculate,
Beat to a common rhythm,

One strong rapture.

All that mothers since the days of Eve
Had given to their sons,

Mary now gave to hers, and more.

And all that sons from Abel failed to do,
He did to make His Mother know

The fullness of His love, unique, sublime,
Because it was the welded love of God and
man,

All flowering in the tiny Infant form
Of Jesus at her breast.

And though the sword of Herod cut across
her night,

Casting its blood-red shadow,

And the dust-brown donkey fled the desert
ways

To ancient Egypt,

Mary held her Son,

And to His Mother clung the blessed Babe,

And from that simple joy was born

All Christmas joy,

All happiness,

Noel,

And Merry Christmas to a waiting world
Waiting no longer.

THE QUEEN'S WORK
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